



NEWS RELEASE

UNITED STATES AIR FORCE

Office of Public Affairs, 377th Air Base Wing, 2000 Wyoming Blvd. S.E.
Kirtland Air Force Base, New Mexico 87117-5606, (505) 846-5991/7019. DSN 246-5991
E-Mail address: pam@commgate.kirtland.af.mil

Pararescuemen conquer the “Needle”, set record

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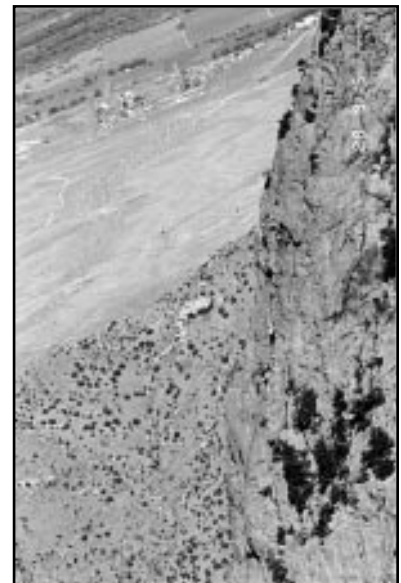
KIRTLAND AIR FORCE BASE, N.M. – Pararescuemen from four major commands celebrated the 50th Anniversary of the Air Force by setting a world record.

Twenty-two PJs, including four members of the Air Force Pararescue School at Kirtland, climbed to the top of the Needle in the Sandia Mountains, just east of Albuquerque, N.M. That is the largest number of people to make the ascent at one time. Tech. Sgt. Ishmael Antonio of the PJ School was the team leader and organizer of the climb. In February he decided to “set a world record and invite every PJ in the country.”

After eight months of groundwork, the journey finally began Aug. 27 with gear preparation and a hike to the base of the Needle. The climb began the next day at dawn.

The lead climbers carried minimum gear in order to safely negotiate the steep walls of the needle and find a safe path for the others to follow.

The ascent lasted all day and into the night as the lead team crested the summit.



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Nightfall and a rockfall presented additional challenges to the remaining teams. Teams that had reached a certain point completed the climb that evening, but the remaining 11 PJs had to sleep on small ledges. Those climbers had to remain tied to an anchor during the night; they were only a roll-over away from a 1,200-foot fall. As soon as daybreak was in sight, the remaining teams continued to the top.

The last man safely reached the summit by 11 a.m. Aug. 29, making the total time about 26 hours.

It was not a recreational climb but a technical training exercise. Missions such as this help PJs to maintain expertise in mountain recovery techniques, such as the ones used in the A-10 recovery in Colorado earlier this year. During the hike to the base and on the climb, the PJs picked up trash and packed it off the mountain, providing a valuable community service at the same time.

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Note to editors: For more information, contact Senior Airman Paul Gritton at (505) 846-4238/5991. DSN prefix is 246. Story by 2nd Lt. Michelle Dugan of the 377th Public Affairs Office. Related images (courtesy of the climbers) can be found at <http://www.kirtland.af.mil/pa/images/pj1.jpg>, [pj2.jpg](http://www.kirtland.af.mil/pa/images/pj2.jpg), [pj3.jpg](http://www.kirtland.af.mil/pa/images/pj3.jpg), [pj4.jpg](http://www.kirtland.af.mil/pa/images/pj4.jpg) and [pj5.jpg](http://www.kirtland.af.mil/pa/images/pj5.jpg)